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THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Poems For Robert Frost

CHAPBOOK NUMBER FIVE

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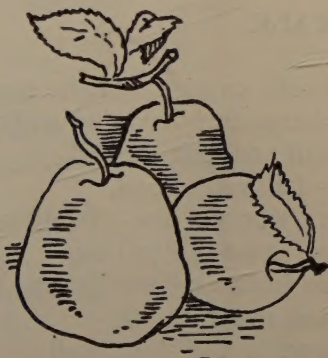
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A FRIENDLY VISIT

poems for Robert Frost

Illustrated by John McNee



If we may write to enhearten one another, Robert Frost is a titan—better say a near-deity—to his writer friends. I treasure him; I wish I might benefit him—GIVE him something—not merely be saying that I do.

Marianne Moore

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A TIME TO TALK

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, "What is it?"
No, not as there is a time to talk.
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
Blade-end up and five feet tall,
And plod: I go up to the stone wall
For a friendly visit.

Robert Frost

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INTRODUCTION

The material in this Chapbook was assembled to pay tribute to one of the living giants of American literature. We all know and respect Robert Frost's poetry. Many of us have been privileged to hear him read or to study under him at one or another of the schools at which he has taught. Many have been influenced by him—consciously or otherwise. But how do creative artists most accurately reflect their feelings? In their work, of course.

So we invited poets of many schools and types to send us a specially written poem, one "inspired in some way (it need not be directly) by Frost, the man, his poetry, or his philosophy." This collection is the result.

It hardly does justice to the man or to his work. In the short compass at our disposal, it would have been impossible to do so. But it does reflect, we think, the unique position and affection in which Robert Frost is held by his fellow-poets. In a field noted for its constantly boiling animosities and passionately held prejudices, this is in itself the most significant tribute.

R. H. G.

A WOOD STOPPED BY

Robert Frost, I've a wood
Of avast by next door,
Wood not virtued deep
In rich as yours. I
Stop by it often; I
Hear bird implore.
I do doubt, though,
I've miles before.

Deeper perhaps darker
This wood than yours, yours
Of that significant
Tree that fell. Up
Falls in this, be sure,
But obstacle is, all
That falls here dwells.

This wood statelied aloft
Oftimes odes false
(Nor does it wholesome
Much with such cold.)
Some (occasion lost) come
Woe'd to't by miles
To fear to go.

Extremed, broken laid,
Sads sighed by leaves.
Here, cloistered grey;
Fail and its irretrieve.
This wood stopped by
Presences deserved depose.
(I've lived loveless slow.)
I watch it fill—
Fill in a hush of snow.

NATURE'S MAN

—an aspect of Robert Frost

No Nature Boy, but boy and grownold man,
he was, is Nature's . . . no, not man
as you'd say for lover, priest, or advocate
or, yet, parishioner or countryman . . .
but in the sense of servant, lord, minion,
and mascot, all, and also journeyman,
of a great once-great lady—her coated man:

her singing man, who fashions her love's vain,
true know-I-know, clear-sweetly tenderèd,
and *sotto voce*, burdens the refrain
with his true, wild *know-not-what* of dread.

William Belvin



OF ROBERT FROST

There is a little lightning in his eyes.
Iron at the mouth.
His brows ride neither too far up nor down.
He is splendid. With a place to stand.
Some glowing in the common blood.
Some specialness within.

Gwendolyn Brooks



THE ROAD HOME

(To Robert Frost)

I was walking on my way home,
A lantern gone out in my hand,
When a voice said slow on the worn road,
"It's lucky we understand,
Without having to see,
The road home."
His lantern was out too.
But even before my neighbor spoke,
Overtaking me,
It was his step I knew.

Witter Bynner

HEARD IN OLD AGE

(In tribute to Robert Frost)

That sweet fire in the veins, while everywhere
The Furies' filth keeps raining down, the young
Make love, make war, make music: the common
tongue

Of private wounds, of the outrage that they share,
Or sing in desperate mockery of despair.

Is there a song left, then, for aged voices?
They are worse than cracked: half throttled by the
thumbs

Of hard self-knowledge. To the old, dawn comes
With ache of loss, with cold absence of choices;
What heart, waking to this, drumming assent, re-
joices?

Traffic rousing, gulls' cries, or cock crow, score
The body's ignominy, the mind's delays;
Till the Engima, in a wandering phrase,
Offers a strain never audible before:
Immense music beyond a closing door.

Babette Deutsch

TO BE EDWARD THOMAS

In under a flock of shade
Wired loosely into light, a generalized swaying of
moss,
Those faceless beards with the breath of water
Stirring, I stooped with the old New England man
Between the leaves let down there,
The sun sitting patched and almost dead
In the white board chairs
We had left, to walk up and down a furlong of the
sea's
Inviolable nakedness, in all its shining-level with
the grave.

Just inside Florida we took our seats.
A bird's cry broke into four.
All around, mimosa, hibiscus,
Palms, the self-choking matted grass: slowly,
Where we were, we were inside
A shadow listening deeply to the light
Come out of a tree of yarn, the wild-wire gentle
glowing.
I glanced at Frost, in him all loved old men
Composed, eroded, in the world's despairing search

For the time-born, original, singing and featureless
face

That moved upon the making of its waters,

And thought, how vulnerable they are, the old,
Whose body in every motion is
Extending back through time: how valuable,
The good ones: how unafraid

As a wind blows out of the sun's dying
Increasing forge-red stroke
Down sea, down the great wild trembling shape
Saw-edged from water risen. Feeling the saw-edge
in the wind,

In the air going over us, a rocking from side to side,
The body warm from the sun shining into the brain,
I saw that a part of light would not
Be there, as it was, without three words:
"The team's head-brass." On the sea, from my mind,
Or another's, two horses, a horse,
His head with ornament alive,

Stood, on the quick soil of ripples, there. It was not
Frost had said,
But Edward Thomas, whom he had known.
The sun gave out. I could not tell if I
Could see the horse, or if he were, with

No light for bright head-gear, for hide,
And thinking instead of Thomas, poor, indetermin-
ate, bare,

Writing acceptable prose, from cottage gone
To cottage with his family, and no work nearest his
heart,

And seeing the old man silent, in the gray dark
straining with wind

Watching me, asked then like a body-blow from the
soul

What it might be

To come to one's self, near the end of life in a war,
Under just this look:

To be brought forth by this.

From living in such friendship Thomas said
Gravely his old and laboring breath away.

He bent upon a tree, a horse,

A look that drew off Time, and put about the thing
Its end and its beginning, like a church. Its Being
blazed

With reverence, upon head-brass and hide, or twigs,
Bark, wind in the interlaced boughs: these, beyond
thought, at last,

What they must surely be: leaves, limbs, beasts, in
their holy reasons:

Determined by him, but given by the world.

In his new poems the brooks and fields

Kept hearing the sound of their making: it was

As silence, and all restraint become

The classic restraint of tears, to let him speak:

Who brought also axes, hop-poles,

Hay-forks, shovels, in, and all

So still, put down just after work, or

Not used in years, whose men in the heat are drows-
ing,

Deep in the brown ring of the land, or dead

As drowsing. He drew close to cattle and plants,

And saw with unparalleled joy each thing his life
required

Grow whole, in what he said.

Low mist lay in on water, where we were.
A tower no one had noticed
Made light, and none of it thrown,
But passed around, intact. We watched the double-
 handled hole
In dark, go by,

Brought off, brought on, brought off.
I looked up levelly. The beam came into my head
Through my nose, or brows. In the momentary face,
Unblinkable, of light, I floated like powder
Assembling. Dark. Then light

Again, and a long-stemmed flash
Through the nose of the skull, of deep, precarious
 bright.

A battle-field framed in a key-hole.
Gone. Once more I waited, still. Shadow
Ignited, and behind it the whole
Light, full out of the blind of the brain.
In the gold-filled arch of bone,

Wire. White heat, not hot,
Spat, arced leaping among the harp-strung graven
 hills

About the fragment of an outline of a man
Struggling, in planetary blue. The dead,

Who inhabit the white of the eye,
Show forth, when shone upon.
This was Vimy Ridge, where Edward Thomas died.
Each time the mowing light went past, I watched
 him, after it,

From his death, as grass behind wind,
Rise, never getting all the way to his feet, as the
 lamp-swung hall

Left him, seeming to sigh like a prow.
To be killed is suddenly to feel the self
Without the body, flash:

To fall wherever you can, upon the ground
Of shell-holes moved in a whorling drift, as from an
oar,
And enter with the closeness of your eyes
The presence of many grains.

Killed many times, and risen off
Alive, alert, into dark, we got up at last
In our bodies, and stood on the long sea-wall
For one more look. The bright flag floated over.
There, in the wilderness glow
And moss of stones, a thicket of little fish.
Light shone them into being:

In the quick of it, from all one side of their weight-
less herd
Their collected vision swayed
Like dust among them: we could see the essential
spark
Travel from eye to eye.

Closed in the dark, till the other arm
Rode out of the lamp, we stood: they had not turned:
A whiff out of bright: fire full of them
Swept, and their bush of inlaid burning
Quivered, once. They were gone with molecular swift-
ness.

You cannot choose whatever thing shall mean.
Out of the whole of chance it must occur,
The meaning felt, escaped into your head, requiring
speech.
Fish, cold in the flight of fire

That speckled the sea with their eyes, may be recast,
And known, and memory rise like the dead,

Assembling the full of sense, as slowly the drowned
recall

What profound, entire grip they had
With their hands, on the sea, when rowing.
The words may yet be said.

Around me, in the flower-lifted room
Of open dark, from the heavy, luminous man
Who had not said a word: from sight, from memory,
From air and fire and water,
A personal permanence, something to say

To myself from every side,
Grew, as having. I thought what friends of mine,
known

Or unknown, as yet in the army of the brother
Lost, might serve me so.

As Frost, Edward Thomas, or whom so I might serve.
Back to the house in the wind

Walking, I would believe therefrom
In field, fish, dark, light, the bundle-bodied grave
To be seen in no outlying flash: to be seen
As the dead see, in the living, the bright horse known
in life

And come back from the sun

In a silence like Being, wherein you gently hold
What you have witnessed, and thence must love, as
utter

Intimate invaluable strangeness:
As it is, as you have made it,
Alive with what human light?

James Dickey

One night last winter I was in the lobby of the Continental Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and saw Mr. Frost come in to buy a newspaper. No one appeared to recognize him or pay him any particular mind, but—I guess I felt like Cleopas at Emmaus. The room shook. Here was one of the immortals.

To a man whose business is literary criticism, that may sound fulsome. But to any of the thousands, or at least hundreds, of writers—and maybe millions of readers—who carry around with them a line or a poem or several poems of Frost's, chanted into the very grain of their vocal chords and the very slant of their eye—the analogy will excuse itself.

As for myself, I went through a long apprenticeship—willy-nilly, as young writers do—to the style and outlook and approach of Frost. He was in fact my immediate forbear, or, to put it another way, the last—and longest—influence on my own way of writing. For years I was shamelessly “in Frost's pocket” in all I thought and set down. At the end of that period came a poem called “The Edge”, which still seems to me so completely Frostian that I have saved it out of all the derivative stuff of those years as a kind of private valedictory. There was never a question of trying to publish it. As far as I was concerned it was written by Robert Frost.

Well—here I was, years later, a couple of yards away from Frost and desperately wishing I could think of something to say to commend myself to him, but at a total loss. I was still at a loss when he bought his paper and left, but I followed him out of there anyway, like a star-struck kid in the wake of a movie-idol. And then it came to me that I could

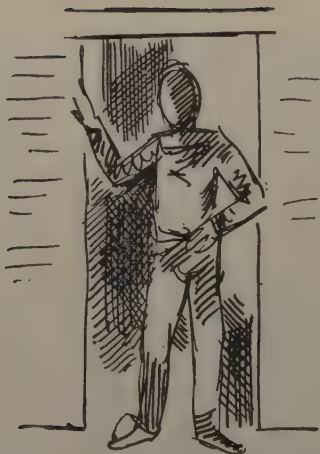
try out "The Edge" on him, that this was in fact the one opportunity I'd be likely to have to deliver that valediction where it was due. So I closed the gap and introduced myself. We talked about a lot of things and saw a good bit of Cambridge before I got around to the poem. When I did, he heard it through twice and said he liked it.

Of course, when I think of the blizzards of neo-Frostian verse the poet has weathered in his time, I can see that whether he liked mine or not he'd probably have said he did for simplicity's sake. Privately, I pretend that in this case what he heard was one more flake pattering into those snowy woods he long ago made a part of the memory of America.

THE EDGE

The moon looks just a few miles back
beyond the meadow in the black
dumb stretch of timber starting here,
and signals me to make the move
from moon-bright field to moonless grove
as if the dark weren't there to fear;
as if the only thing to scare
a lonely lunatic out there
would be the crash of startled deer—
and nothing in a man looked back
to make sure of the wagon-track
that led his moonlight walking here.

Peter Kane Dufault



The figure in the doorway — Jm

Robert Frost was the first poet to encourage me in print. The year was 1925. I was twenty-one. He singled out a poem of mine and now, thirty-one years later, I enjoy his gesture in a way that only the passage of those years could insure.

The book was entitled *The Arts Anthology, Dartmouth Verse 1925*, with an Introduction by Robert Frost. It was printed, attractively, by The Mosher Press in Portland, Maine.

In his short introduction Mr. Frost presented an unusual image of the poet. He wrote, "No one given to looking under-ground in spring can have failed to notice how a bean starts its growth from the seed. Now the manner of a poet's germination is less like that of a bean in the ground than of a water-

spout at sea. He has to begin as a cloud of all the other poets he ever read. That can't be helped. And first the cloud reaches down toward the water from above and then the water reaches up toward the cloud from below and finally cloud and water join together to roll as one pillar between heaven and earth. The base of water he picks up from below is of course all the life he ever lived outside of books."

From this beginning Frost went on to place older and then the present undergraduate poets in one of the three parts of his image and to conclude with some trenchant remarks, one of which was "School and college have been conducted with the almost express purpose of keeping him (the poet) busy with something else till the danger of his ever creating anything is past."

Shortly after World War II, in Cambridge, I was invited to meet Frost at one of the Harvard colleges for dinner before a reading of his poems. I pulled down my old, valued, signed copy of *The Arts Anthology* to take along. I had not seen Frost for many years and wondered if he would recall that old book. When I pulled it out of my pocket he recognized it at once, with a special relish and fondness, and then signed it again with happy words all those years later.

Richard Eberhart

THE CIRCLE

(Lake Sunapee between wars)

My ax arc the round sky morning landed in grain of
ages.

Pine scent anointed me . . . the needles tasted acid
Like an ant. My head and heart heard water lapping.

Young wind,

That made my inner falterings a poem, ran down,
Skipping, shifting, palmed by the Indian-named wild,
silver lake;

While on the shore a spider web in silken sunlight
Balanced between two hemlocks. It gave like a sail.

It sprang

Sweetly, playing air after air with the authority
Of art and livelihood and beauty—beauty sun-tested,
Strung by all danger. The round world shrinks.

"We have only flowers,"

The Hungarian woman cried: "So why are you afraid!"

Because the flowers were inexorable. Their grace
Cut terror to the bone. It was mercy, pity, peace,
That stared, more naked than calamity, keeping
Its web in light past light.

And I saw New Hampshire asters,
Violet and inviolate in the red fall, as I climbed
Above that lake on Sunset Hill—the blueberry, mica,
Maple sugar mountain—and I ran through tiered
spruce boughs,

Following the porcupine upstairs, coming to the over
And under, bare slopes in the wind, rock light to
water light,

Bird whistling down the cracks of the mica-eyed
sky bowl.

The distance shone its motion through me. I was
the pivot

Of a wheel. Mountain after mountain shouldered
the sun, down dark.

Was it only youth and high reception? Remember-
ing—

As the earth's galactic violence fills with wheeling
storms—

Remembering its being. My repetitions die
And spring in the animal turns of day and night.

I was;

I am; of blood and air, bound out disastrously,
Bound in, by heart's communication.

Web and flower,

The rounds, they skate my stars. I go back for the
testing.

John Hay

THE FOLDING KEY

From a farmhouse summer I brought home,
To remember Vermont, a folding key,
Five inches open, at midshank a hinge,
Key to a door to a hole to the sky.
For my pocket, a metaphor with no poem.

My key was hand-hammered, blade-thin,
One pinhead rivet through at the bend,
Two more at the finger-hold, a heart-
Shaped edge, neither beginning nor end
Around where a small heart had not been.

The image is easy enough to raise:
A man who made it, and carried it:
Brad McLaughlin, Frost, Fred Cole:
What he locked in with the key, or out:
The lives of the house, the years of days:

The weathers around the world, of war,
Or peace: on soil-builders, on wall-
Menders, leaf-treaders, wood-piling men.
The image is raised, yet not so tall
As not to be looked on by a star.

The key is the metaphor, and is all.
My key is handled too much to rust,
But sweat on iron has turned it dark.
The nick for my thumbnail, when I must,
Opens it whole. The part is the whole.

John Holmes



an old man's winter night - sm

PLEAS

(To Robert Frost and his Audience)

1. *"My shadow turned and cut
the corner like a knife.
Need I say this twice?

It walked ahead, behind
my life. Note the device?
Well? I said: My shadow . . ."*
2. "All right, genius mine,
I get the point—but" (sneeze)
"since when am I your shadow?

I'm your wife. And so?
It's late, let's go to bed.
Snap off the lights. Please?"

Edwin Honig



ACCEPTANCE

God, in His infinite wisdom,
Did not make me very wise—
So when my actions are stupid
They hardly take God by surprise.

Langston Hughes

EPILOGUE TO A REASONABLE MASQUE
for Robert Frost

"The serpent's tail stuck down the serpent's throat"
You say she says, most trenchant wife and Job's
Best comforter. Well then, this lilac thought
To be our tree of life? And that gnarled apple
Which God's incessant worm still neatly probes
To snatch extremity? Permit the worm
His cannibal circumference, assign
The worm to wind essential lilac also?
Or somehow this swart serpent will explode
And leave escape-hatch spiral? Shall we tell
New tales beyond the kodak of this world?

Garden burst to gaudy bush, who'll know
What film is negative or proof-print surely?
But in such holocaust we'll likely go
With apple and with lilac and with Job
And Job's insouciant helpmeet on a cloud
Absorbent too for serpents. Having found
Where your old mountain brook's been running to,
We may not need the lilac or the apple
Nor even miss the comfortable old worm;
But we'd not like to lose the wife of Job
Or miss the luck of timeless talk with you.

Jeremy Ingalls

EVIL MOUNTAIN

The evil mountain looked quite squat by day,
all open to the sun—just big, that's all,
and smackdab in the road. It would not fall
and was not likely to be talked away.

I asked a workman what a man should do
who has no heart for climbing, who can find
no way to get around nor any kind
of wings—who can't return, who must get through.
He leaned upon his ugly-snouted drill
and cheerily said that I could wait—or lend
a hand. They had made quite a dent (the end
of granite, granted, being slow). The hill
(he called it) on blueprint was destroyed. I might
have stayed, except it loomed so black at night.

Judson Jerome

INDIAN BREAD

As boys we made Indian bread. We cut
The spring ferns from the roots and stewed the roots
Into mush and dried the mush on a rock.
We tasted it, then we built the fire to cook
It better, and it came out black salad.
We tasted that too; that was very bad.

Yet every springtime when the fern came up
We cut the roots and stewed them in a cup,
Letting the sprays lie broken where they fell,
And dumping out the mush we baked it well
And tasted some and left it all for dead,
A horsebun in the grass, our Indian bread.

And now I am older I have gone back
To the green places where we used to cook
The springtime dream. The kitchen is overgrown,
Streets, curbs, hydrants, fences, hedges, lawns,
And steaming houses where the people burn
Their lives out on the site of the lost fern.

I buttonholed the owner of a place,
Told him of the vanished oven his days
Were cooking in. Chuckling he said he reckoned
He'd cook himself a few months yet, then find
A spot where his kids too could tear them out,
The fern-roots, and boil them well in a vat.

I struck homeward on the hills. Glancing down
On the woods drifting in unbroken green,
I heard my own blood, crashing like an axe,
Echo from the hills . . . Dear God, may it make,
This greenest country where the spring fern fed,
For the green and the wild, some Indian bread.

Galway Kinnell

THE PAST IS PRESENT

(as an old Turtle sees it)

If you'd like to know, dear People, large or small,
why I pull in my head this is the reason:

Hidden within my shell, no Fantasy
can start my legs beyond their normal speed
or Ambition stray beyond Reality.

The way I was created Philosophy
or something one bears in mind now and then,
is a good enough guide to measure me

with proper circumspection before I die.
After all I'm a turtle centuries old.
And compared with the bold who've passed me by
and reached their destination in no time
I'm likely to last a few centuries more
and leave behind enormous creatures who,
like Man himself, outdistance me in space,
yet cannot catch up with my slow pace.

Thus it is I enjoy the ironic style
of authors who are deep enough to feel
opposite sides of a question as they embrace
the Optimist and Pessimist alike
or strike the balance of masterly designs
the ancients began and moderns trace today.
For after all has been pondered, said or done,
the past is present in signs that we pursue
for the future to be alive with the past
as three tenses combine into one.

If I smile at my age pardon me.
And don't mind if I scurry out of sight
as a hawk takes perfect aim from his sky
and misses me within an inch of my life.
"An inch is as good as a mile," so they say.
And here in this free pool *I* say Good Night!

Alfred Kreymborg

*Home burial**jm*

LINES FOR ROBERT FROST

With the left arm holding off the world
 Tone-deaf to him, he taught it by not singing
 That diffidence could sing, knowing from the start
 "What to make of a diminished thing,"
 Himself (he surely knew) the counterpart
 Of his own artful oven bird,
 Whose very silence is a kind of word.

Ernest Kroll

TWO TREES

"The tree has no leaves and may never have them again.

We must wait till some months hence in the spring to know."

—Robert Frost

Two trees lose clothes of leaves
And light, uncovering their nice embrace:
Distinct trunks with one crown which moulds
Itself like a brain inside a skull
Of sky. The trees' rapture starts the breeze
And whips the talking wind. I join the quiet,
Anxious men, who cannot comprehend
This ages-long intercourse of trees
And who dread that secret spring when two
Trees' bones make the reach of limbs.

John Logan

THE SMALL BOY

There was a boy to take blueberries
Making a juice by squashing them,
Mixing them well with sugared milk
And knowing a ritual use of them.

At five the bending buttercups to him
Were real worlds not wanting words,
Their petals free of association, hint,
Or fear of scythe-blade swords.

There were monsters in his ponds
Complete with pincers and grey
Tubes that drew the vital juices
From the frantic insect prey.

In a rabbit's nest he learned all
About warmth; his passion for
Sparrows did not clash with his eye,
Arrows he fired into a door.

Well, he could stick green rhubarb
Into brown sugar, cram choke-cherries
From bended bough into freckled face
And harvest the meadow's strawberries.

Bark he touched he possessed,
Eggs discovered were books alive;
There was a touch and taste to life
He only had when he was five.

That's the kind of boy to dream
To death a dozen heroes and kings;
Dream them to glory, and dream them
To life again, to greater things.

Now, grown and wed and brought
To bed for twenty-eight Novembers,
He dreams his son becomes his self,
That self that he remembers.

Lachlan MacDonald

UNIVERSE

Is the face of the universe its familiar
Countenance of mountains of the world and moon,
Gallaceous nebulae and mild meadows
And the fence rails of these features we discern?
Its spirit behind these of mystery to us,
Loud in the whirlwind, soft in the breathing land,
Speaking a self beyond the dusts of summer,
A truth intemperate to the facts at hand?

Or is the face of the universe turned from us,
Its speech straight and simple in return?
Whichever, either, we must give the answer
That voice and face tell not the same concern.
And this hard answer, not from the universal
Voice, but from ours, our face, our voice, we learn.
Josephine Miles

THE UNCOMFORTABLE TIC

If you were there to see the moon blow through—
The clouds blotting and fetching, finally going—
Still, if you saw the blowing, you will know
How much of moonlight you might misconstrue:
Who can foretell, autumns and crows away,
What a slow switch of bough goes on to say?

Imagining it right,
Even without the sleight
Of looking the other way,
Frost: hoeing, pruning, patching, conserving,
 and weather-forecasting,
Knows otherwise.

To see as they shine with sunlight and with salt
The feathers, the birds' marauders,
Yellow and red;
To see the dead tree dead;
To write while the world wages:

Or bob for apples,
Fallways to go down
(And you can only fall . . .)
Tearing the pages:

Änd then to see the crippled tree blow up,
Blow like a chariot, dragging the low swing,
Dragging the field to southward, everything leaving:

And then to know by the twitch in the eye of joy—
The uncomfortable tic—
Another Spring,
Another race for it.

Rosalie Moore

PLACE AND TIME

From Lounder's meadow to the end
Of Crabtree's road at Crabtree's Bend
Our summers run, a small domain
Along the coast of eastern Maine,
Which is our world. We come to stay
About the twenty-fifth of May,
To make our hold on Hancock good
And learn what storms the house withstood
Between September and the last
White frost no more than one week past,
That hovers coldly in the air
Like February. Everywhere
We look the world is still the same:
Here spring is late; a green-gold flame
Of leafing birch or willow catches
The sun in some neglected patches,
Though spruce and blackened larches keep
A chill about them like a sleep;
And where the naked warmth strikes through
Against the house an hour or two
Each day, the stemless violet
Already blossoms in the wet.
Now dandelions spot the lawn,
And alder catkins shrivel, gone
Almost before the leaves are spread
A mouse-ear big. High overhead
A seagull turns and turns in light
(Blown white on black, then black on white),
Drawing all thought away from land
Until, like islanders, we stand
Where we can look across the bay,
And time, like distance, drops away.

But space and time will claim us, too.
We have a hundred things to do
Before we're really settled in
And the long days we like begin.
Surprise contains us, first: we let
The door swing wide until we get
Accustomed to some inner change
That makes the house a little strange
When we come in. We care too much,
Almost, about the things we touch,
Though we grow used to being here,
And tables, chairs, and books appear
Familiar in the common chill
Of daylight stretching east until
The thin horizon—sea and rock—
Draws in around us. Now we talk
Like natives, and we hear the neighbors.
We hail each other from our labors,
Taking good weather to beguile
Our noon away on one square mile
Of news as local as our pride;
For so our ease is satisfied.
And confident of our estate,
We go our ways, not separate
Or merely glad to settle here
For four months out of every year:
We bring our independence round
By slow degrees to common ground,
Mindful of how our summers run
Between two seasons of the sun,
From Lounder's meadow to the end
Of Crabtree's road at Crabtree's Bend.

Samuel French Morse

TREES

To be a giant and keep quiet about it,
To stay in one's own place;
To stand for the constant presence of process
And always to seem the same;
To be steady as a rock and always trembling,
Having the hard appearance of death
With the soft, fluent nature of growth,
One's Being deceptively armored,
One's Becoming deceptively vulnerable;
To be so tough, and take the light so well,
Freely providing forbidden knowledge
Of so many things about heaven and earth
For which we should otherwise have no word—

Poems or people are rarely so lovely,
And even when they have great qualities
They tend to tell you rather than exemplify
What they believe themselves to be about,
While from the moving silence of trees,
Whether in storm or calm, in leaf and naked,
Night and day, we draw conclusions of our own,
Sustaining and unnoticed as our breath
And perilous also—though there has never been
A critical tree—about the nature of things.

Howard Nemerov

UNMENDED WALL

Something there is that does not love a wall,
Indeed, where ivy twines or hangs, will split
Any stone as if the devil's tail
Had struck a dark truth inside. Some Thing,
We say, has "happened" in the stone. Cold,
Perhaps—that cold that breaks earth and bends
The sea to desperate plasticity—
Or some less clear Familiar of the dark.
Whatever it is, it brings a wall down hard,
Given its own time. So we must think
On timely walls as on mortality.
The palisades of heaven open and close
They say (And dread the day that they have fallen!)
And even heaven has known treacherous weather,
As we have known most barbarous slaughter where
No walls have been. I would hold brief for walls
Against such things, and add: no welcome is
Without a wall that He without may be
Welcomed in. A wall is no weapon.
It is, when best made, sole permission
For imperfect life—and always holds
A gate. Or so I try to tell my neighbor
Who repudiates my small estate.
We do not argue. He would have walls down.
Walls, he tells me, are for cows. He frowns,
Charming the spring. His rude truth offends
Both him and me: we see it must include
Each man's title to some platitude.

Anthony Ostroff

MUCH AS I OWN I OWE**(for Robert Frost)**

The woods themselves are different; other trees
Have shouldered in, and tangled up the breeze,
And tangled up the paths, and tangled men,
Till some of us will not emerge again.

Look at this leaf and say—

Did the veins used to run in just this way?

Say if the rings of even the oldest oak
Are as they were before I stood and spoke
Just now; or has the drafting-pen begun
Another circle past the latest one?

Is speech itself the same?

Or does this sunbeam modify your name

And, falling through the boughs, alter by this
The language of our loves and heresies?

We re-invent the compass and the axe
To force a way through newly burgeoned facts.

More homage can you need,
Who ride beyond, with chariot and steed?

Adrienne Cecile Rich

NEW HAMPSHIRE AGAIN

I remember black winter waters,
I remember thin white birches,
I remember sleepy twilight hills,
I remember riding across New
Hampshire lengthways.

I remember a station named
"Halcyon," a brakeman call-
ing to passengers "Halcyon!!
Halcyon!!"

I remember having heard the
gold diggers dig out only
enough for wedding rings.

I remember a stately child tell-
ing me her father gets letters
addressed "Robert Frost, New
Hampshire."

I remember an old Irish saying,

"His face is like a fiddle and
everyone who sees him must
love him."

I have one remember, two re-
members, ten remembers; I
have a little handkerchief
bundle of remembers.

One early evening star just over
a cradle moon,

One dark river with a spatter of
later stars caught,

One funnel of a motorcar head-
light up a hill,

One team of horses hauling a
bobsled load of wood,

One boy on skiis picking himself
up after a tumble—

I remember one and a one and a
one riding across New Hamp-
shire lengthways: I have a lit-
tle handkerchief bundle of re-
members.

Carl Sandburg

AN OLD BOY'S WILL

For Robert Frost

What the boy willed was song for the mowed
meadow,
For storm and night coming on, for storm arrived,
For winter coming on, leaves down, for the pause
By the woods' edge, for night, his delay by the woods,
For the scythe's whisper that omitted the flower.
Oh, not all flowers to spare. He knew that we knew
Most of the flowers had in the common grass
Necessitous share of the common blade: mowed
The meadow must be for fall and storm and nightfall.
But there between the whisper and the woods—
There in benignant dusk near avoided night—
Thin edge between—there the flower for song
As first he looked for it, as late he found it
To gather and bring back; one aster a dark star.

Winfield Townley Scott

ROBERT FROST: THE ROAD TAKEN

The poet stopped on the edge of night,
And the road through dark wound on.
Black trees arose; the wind was still;
Blind skeletal walls inched over the hill
In the mole-grey dawn.

He thought of the way by which he had come,
Mastered through long years—
Tangles of form and substance, dense
Thickets past which with experience
A writer steers.

He gazed beyond the familiar night
On the reasons reason curbs—
Adjectives which say too little,
Adverbs that flare, or with dust settle
On shining verbs.

A dim house ahead, a journey completed,
Out of darkness, dawn.
The blind walls move: his words awaken
Here on the page; and the road taken
Winds on.

William Jay Smith

R.F. AT BREADLOAF—
HIS HAND AGAINST A TREE

His hand on the saw
 ed off should
 er of a tree
Companions he and the cross
 grained bark
 crusted fellow from whose stub
 born t hickness limb
 er switches lean
 and wag young leaves
Lines in that hand
 whorls in that tree re
 cord a brothers' chronic
 le the stoic accrual of s
 elfhood from the c ore out
Flat of his palm and flat
 of the cut fork meet fit
 tingly
Lots of trees in the fo
 rest but this one's an O
 a K that's plan
 ted hims elf and nob
 oddy has k nots of that hand
 some polish or the knarl
 edge of ear th or the obs

tiny ate servation his blueyes
make or the tr easures his sent
ient t humb les find

His sig nature's on the he art
of his time

Snowcrop on rude dy square b
locked f orehead
on summer's dreamhead
Snowrim over w him sey t wink
led blueyes

And veined in autumn g love
that ax and ax
iom h ardent hand

O may it feel many sp rings
widening warm hone y ed
g lad as the c limb of youth

May Swenson

FROST IN PERU

"Keep Cold"

My mind snags often on that yarn you spun
(but first you saw it, so you thought, ragged
paper, twirling madly in the distance,
zooming toward you like a target, a reader
badly needed; you homed it in your hand.
There at once it tautened into thread.
You pulled, Whirling, it snarled like wool
and according as chance was minded wove
into a woman veined and ribbed and frayed
or a gaffer stained with all his rovings
and still one). And so a poem is won.

All this, you say, as you were standing
once on a certain corner in Lima. Rather
the way, I think, that Lima came to you:
birds of a feather winging tropic weather.
Else how in such late time and rocky world
as ours do you sing up breath that's strong
enough to nest the sturdy human thing?

I am reminded, in this connection,
of a myth I've a bit extended, stemming—
so does much of you—straight from the Greeks:
on that reel of thread those haggard girls
mete out to us some few have learned how
to twirl them, if not dangle, bait and angle
till one's hardly sure who's fishing whom.
So you, daring all, string them along,
pull suddenly, as suddenly let go,
and there, startled, they appear, tangled
in their stuff or singing naked-fair
for ugly, in your mild-tough, grinning air.

T. Weiss

THIS IS PIONEER WEATHER

Me, go to Florida!

Ha ha!

At Northfield when

we were girls

we used to take

the trays

we

had in the kitchen

and sit on them

Wow!

what a thrill!

in the field

back of the

school!

down hill screaming

our heads off!

William Carlos Williams

